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ABSTRACT

Successful teacher mentoring programs require strong leadership. School principals must be prepared to provide this leadership by planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating a mentoring program that is based on research and best practice. This paper provides practical information about how principals can create an environment favorable to mentoring, manage personnel, assign teaching duties, and use resources to provide training and support for both new teachers and mentors to learn and grow professionally. (Contains 21 references.) (Author)

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Beginning Teacher Mentoring Programs: The Principal's Role

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The U.S. Department of Education has predicted that two million new teachers will need to be hired during the first decade of the 21st century. The current teacher shortage—combined with a public clamoring for greater teacher accountability, a changing student population, and tough state standards—creates new and difficult challenges for teachers. In addition, an increasing percentage of students experience chronic and acute social and educational failure because of limited English proficiency, learning disabilities, or poverty.

All of these trends, along with the reality shock of facing their first job, lead beginning teachers to feel overwhelmingly stressed and isolated—both in the classroom and in their personal lives. These factors are taking their toll on the number of teachers who become disillusioned with teaching and drop out of the profession during their first few years. Fortunately, substantial research literature shows that effective mentoring programs can lower the attrition rate for new teachers and significantly facilitate their induction into the profession (Newhall et al. 1994).

Obviously no single program design can be implemented in all situations; however, the school principal must provide strong leadership whatever the mentoring program (Brock and Grady 1998). To implement effective mentoring programs, school principals must begin by focusing on their fundamental reasons for being educational leaders, their core values and beliefs about teaching and learning, and their visions for changing and improving education. These subjective elements greatly affect a program's design, its implementation, and its success or failure. Principals must create the conditions and design for an effective mentoring program; select, train, and support mentors; and continually evaluate and revise their programs based on feedback from mentors and their protégés.

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The Purpose of Mentoring

It is essential for principals and their staffs to understand the purpose of their district's mentoring program. Types of programs include (1) orientation, (2) developing positive perceptions about the organization, (3) providing continuous staff development designed to improve teaching and learning, and (4) recruiting new teachers and retaining those currently employed. Fully developed programs typically serve multiple purposes; however, few program designers have sufficiently articulated the leadership roles that school principal should play in such programs. This ambiguity tends to foster multiple interpretations of the program's purposes. The absence of shared values and beliefs about the purposes of mentoring, coupled with the cultural norms of autonomy and isolation in teaching, tend to make many mentoring programs ineffective. A quality mentoring program can be designed to achieve a variety of purposes, but leadership makes all the difference. Clearly, the more expectations there are for mentoring programs to produce "results," the more resources and administrative supervision required, and the greater the dependence on research and best practice needed to achieve the desired results (Sweeney 1998). Good teaching does not just happen. Teachers must be hired who demonstrate the capacity to become excellent teachers, and then they must be provided with opportunities to learn and grow with the support of veteran colleagues. For this to happen effectively, principals must model and sanction the goals of their mentoring programs (Sweeney 1998). In the case of science teachers, principals must encourage and support instruction that is hands-on and inquiry based.

Creating the Conditions for Effective Mentoring

Teachers' values, beliefs, and actions are shaped by the structures, policies, and traditions of their workplace (Rosenholtz 1989). To the extent that school principals are capable of manipulating and controlling bureaucratic structures, interpreting and implementing policies, and shaping shared values and beliefs that influence the school social organization, they are capable of creating the conditions necessary to implement an effective teacher mentoring program. However, like so much else that goes on in schools, a program's success depends on the principal's active daily support. How can the principal create such conditions? Here are some suggestions for principals to consider when setting up new or improving existing mentor programs:

Communicate Beliefs, Values, and Goals

Principals should consult with the central office to learn as much as possible about the purpose and goals of their district's induction and mentoring program and also to learn the parameters of their discretion to modify the program. Principals must take the initiative to develop a clear expression of the core beliefs, values, and goals of their district's program. Mentoring programs that help beginning teachers become successful are developed with purpose and have an articulated vision statement upon which the program is based (Gordon 1991). To accomplish this objective, principals

should speak out and behave in a manner that demonstrates a clear understanding of the learning environment, student needs, professional development needs of teachers, and a basic philosophy of management, all of which are informed by a sizable body of research literature and best practice. The principal should also convey to the science teacher his or her belief in and commitment to the importance of science in the curriculum. Moreover, the principal should promote a science curriculum that has safety as a focus; content that includes ethical and societal issues; and activities that engage students in experimentation and discussion of the findings.

Make Informed Decisions

Principals today must be able to view problems associated with planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating mentoring programs from multiple perspectives. They must look at control, coordination, and accountability. They must also meet the needs of new teachers while attending to the good of the whole staff and balancing equity versus excellence issues. Principals must be able to arrive at sound, logical, and objective decisions that are grounded in research and best practice and that are agreeable to those affected. Here are some suggestions to guide principals in making good decisions as they develop new or improve existing mentor programs:

- Review the research literature on teacher mentoring.
- Talk with teachers, principals, and union officials in districts where successful mentoring programs have been implemented.
- Consult with university faculty who have knowledge of mentoring program development and implementation.
- Network with the state office of education.

Share Decision-Making

To create an environment favorable to the development of teacher induction and mentoring programs, the central office must foster the development of a democratic school culture where teachers are involved in decision-making processes that focus on teaching, learning, and student issues (Pajak 1992). Principals must assume a central role in this process by overseeing the direct administration of the mentoring program and by guiding a school committee (that includes science teachers) in the development and implementation of the program. Here are some suggested tasks for the principal on this committee:

- Articulate the purpose of mentoring, program design, and program components.
- Guide the committee in the development of an action plan that has objectives and time lines, assigns responsibilities, and includes an evaluation.
- Define the role and tasks of the principal, mentor, peer coach/instructional expert, teachers' union, and beginning teacher.
- Help the committee decide how mentors will be selected.

- Discuss how mentors and protégés will be matched.
- Plan mentor training.

Self Promote

The principal plays a crucial role in showing students, parents, and the community how the mentoring program helps support new teachers (Ganser 2001). Students may be curious about the relationship between a mentor and a new teacher. Parents need to understand the purpose of the mentoring program so they do not conclude that assigning a mentor to a "rookie" is an attempt to cover up poor teaching (Ganser 2001). To accomplish this task, principals should use a variety of media, such as writing articles for school newsletters, speaking on community radio programs, appearing on local TV talk shows, writing news reports for the local newspaper, posting information on the district's website, and speaking to clubs and service organizations.

Recruit and Hire Excellent Teachers

Excellent principals make a significant difference in their schools. They help all students meet or exceed minimum learning outcomes in the core curriculum by employing and mobilizing teachers who are committed to student growth and learning. Excellent teachers make a profound difference in the lives of students. Poor teachers, however, are enormously costly—not only in the time required to supervise, counsel, support, and evaluate them, the legal costs incurred in their dismissal, and the wasted salary but also in the cost of the educational deprivation in the lives of their students. Although school leaders cannot neglect to provide substantial support to marginal teachers, excellent teachers require far less help and are, therefore, a better investment. So, of course, districts must hire only the best teachers.

Mentoring programs are excellent recruiting tools. Many candidates, anxious about their first teaching job, will accept a lower paying job in a school district that offers them support over a position in a higher paying district that does not. During the interview, principals should talk with prospective teachers about their district's mentoring program.

Respect Confidentiality

It is paramount to the success of mentoring and induction programs that the relationship between the mentor and new teacher remain confidential. Principals should make it a point never to talk to mentors about the progress of new teachers. The temptation to ask a mentor, "How are things going?" is detrimental to the mentor/protégé relationship (Ganser 2001). Although it is essential that the mentoring program be assessed, a form of evaluation should be used that guarantees the anonymity of participants.

Manage Resources

Principals must develop specific ways to assess the needs of students and teachers; effectively use staff; efficiently use time; equitably acquire and allocate space, equipment, and materials; and wisely and prudently budget and distribute financial resources that are essential to the success of the mentoring program. Principals must be capable of managing these resources to provide incentives, recognition, and rewards; training for mentors; release time for mentors and their protégés; materials; and professional development for new teachers. Unfortunately, levels of funding in many school districts are inconsistent from year to year because of changes in state funding formulas, property tax value, school district leadership, budget priorities, and local politics (Laine 2000). As a result, mentoring programs are frequently the first victims of budget cuts. Unwavering financial commitment to mentoring programs sends a clear message to staff that support for beginning teachers is a priority.

Mentoring Program Design

Orientation

Regardless of whether a formal induction and mentoring program exists, there are plenty of things that schools can do to induct new teachers into the profession. For example, principals can introduce them to their colleagues and include them in social as well as professional activities. When resources allow, orientation programs are a great way to begin a process of socializing new staff into the school "family," values, and traditions. It is important that the orientation components and activities be decided upon several months before planning begins. For example, will there be district, building, and community orientations? Will key personnel be introduced? Will hepatitis B and blood-borne pathogen training be included? Will sexual harassment be addressed? Will copies of teacher handbooks, curriculum guides, and union contracts be distributed?

Principal's Role and Tasks

Beginning teachers know their principal will determine whether their contract is renewed, and so they anxiously seek feedback that they are performing satisfactorily. Principals often describe a conflict between their duty to evaluate all teachers on the one hand, and their desire to nurture beginning teachers on the other hand (Cole 1993). Mentoring programs can mediate this dilemma. Where mentoring programs exist, principals are responsible for evaluating teachers formally and the job of nurturing beginning teachers is delegated to others.

What should the role of the principal be in mentoring new teachers? Here are some things principals can do to induct new teachers into the profession:

- Champion the mentoring program.
- Oversee and be visibly involved in the mentoring program.
- Orient new teachers to school values, procedures, and cultural and social norms

(Sergiovanni 1995). Communicate school traditions and expectations for teaching and student learning (Brock and Grady 1998).

- Visit new teachers' classrooms regularly. Initiate conversation by asking questions and giving feedback about instructional matters (Hope 1999).
- Promote collegial relationships.
- Provide new teachers with role models besides their mentors and peer coaches.
- Maximize new teachers' success by reducing their duties and responsibilities.
- Assign new teachers only within disciplines they are qualified to teach.
- Reduce new teachers' isolation by assigning them to well-equipped classrooms that are close to the mainstream of the school (Brock and Grady 2001).
- Provide new teachers with professional development opportunities that center on their immediate needs.
- Provide teachers hired in late summer with additional support and time to prepare to teach.
- Ensure that there are adequate resources to support mentoring program goals and activities.

Mentor's Roles and Tasks

Program goals will determine the roles and tasks of mentors and have a great influence on mentor selection. Will mentors be expected to help beginning teachers acquire professional knowledge and skills or just socialize them to their culture and acquaint them with local policies, politics, and procedures? According to conventional wisdom, novice teachers must be frequently observed, evaluated, and given substantial instructional guidance; provided opportunities to observe veteran teachers who model best practice; and be actively engaged in an ongoing dialogue with other teachers about instructional matters. In the case of a science teacher, the mentor also should be aware of the National Science Teachers Association's position statements (*www.nsta.org/position*).

Despite the essential needs of beginning teachers, however, few mentor teachers have the time, experience, or skill to accomplish such tasks satisfactorily, and, even with training, are often strongly opposed to evaluating their peers—even informally. Furthermore, those teachers best suited to mentor their inexperienced colleagues may not wish to do so. It is ill-advised to assign mentoring responsibilities to teachers who do not want to perform such duties. Mentors are best used in a supportive role while someone else evaluates novice teachers.

What are some rewards and incentives principals can provide veteran teachers that will encourage them to volunteer to become mentors? Here are some ideas to consider:

- Offer stipends, release from added responsibilities, a reduced teaching load.
- Recognize mentors and protégés with special luncheons, media releases, lapel pins.
- Provide quality training for mentors.

- Schedule the mentor's and protégé's work days so they coincide.
- Plan and schedule periodic meetings between the mentor and protégé.
- Offer professional development opportunities that mentor and protégé can attend together.
- From time to time, bring groups of new teachers and mentors together in social situations where they can talk shop and develop social bonds.
- Establish an electronic network among mentors and protégés.

Peer Coach's Role and Tasks

Anyone with knowledge and skill in the areas of clinical supervision, counseling, research in effective teaching practice, beginning teacher concerns, and theories of adult learning may perform the function of a peer coach. It is essential that the relationship between new teachers and a peer coach, not unlike that of the mentor and new teacher, be a confidential one. Novice teachers need opportunities to discuss questions and problems that arise in the course of their work and receive feedback from an expert without fear of reprisal. The role of the peer coach is different from that of the mentor. The peer coach tends to focus on matters of pedagogy, curriculum, and classroom management, whereas the mentor, more often than not, becomes a "go-to" person to answer questions about school procedures, to be a friend, or to be someone to provide moral support when things do not go as planned. When choosing a peer coach, here are some considerations:

- The peer coach must be an expert in matters of teaching and learning, classroom management, and curriculum. In order to be especially helpful to a beginning science teacher, the peer coach needs to be an expert in the uses of a variety of techniques, including cooperative learning groups, computer simulations, laboratory investigations and experiments, lab write-ups, hands-on activities, and demonstrations.
- The peer coach must be able to relate to, understand, and communicate with others in a way that contributes to harmonious relationships and goal accomplishment. This person also must be able to provide intervention in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- The peer coach must be highly respected by the veteran staff and be able to become an ambassador for the program.
- The peer coach must be very flexible, adapting his or her schedule to that of several dozen new teachers.
- The peer coach must be able to commit to several hours of direct contact with each new teacher—observing, counseling, and coaching.

Mentor Selection

When principals choose mentors themselves, they should do so in accordance with the goals and purpose of the mentoring program (Sweeney 1994). If the mentor

selection involves a committee process, principals should be the facilitator of a nominal group process. For example, the principal should influence how mentors are chosen by steering the mentor selection committee in the development of criteria, review of applications, and selection of mentors (Ganser 2001). Unfortunately, it is often impossible to select an excellent mentor because there are none available that have the essential qualities or skills to become a successful mentor (Brock and Grady 1998). Furthermore, mentors hold personal convictions about their role as mentors (Saunders, Pettinger, and Tomlinson 1995) that are probably unknown to most principals. Even if principals were aware of the preconceived beliefs of their teachers in their role as mentors, mentor training, as typically designed, is unlikely to change mentors' orientations. Some schools remedy this situation by employing a peer coach and by differentiating the roles and duties of the peer coach and mentors. Other schools assign several new teachers to a single mentor. When this alternative is used, mentors need to be released from their teaching duties in order to fulfill their mentoring responsibilities.

What should a principal consider when selecting mentors? Here are some ideas to consider:

- Choose mentors who teach in the same grade range (i.e., primary or intermediate) or subject area as that of their protégés.
- Select mentors whose teaching schedules and planning or lunch periods coincide with those of their protégés.
- Select mentors who work in close proximity to their protégés (Ganser 2001).
- Choose mentors who have been teaching for at least five years (Sweeney 1994).
- Choose mentors who are highly skilled teachers and who have earned the esteem of their colleagues.
- Choose mentors who can develop and maintain positive and trusting relationships with others (Brooks 1996).
- Choose mentors who have high expectations of their students.

Professional Development Activities for New Teachers

Many teachers would say that professional development in their districts has had little, if any, effect on their teaching practices or on student learning (Sizer 1992). In fact, in spite of an abundance of information that is available about what constitutes good professional development (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 1996; Little 1993; Thompson and Zueli 1997), traditional inservice activities tend to be disconnected from issues of curriculum and learning and lack continuity (Cohen and Ball 1999). Principals are the primary staff developers because they have the greatest control over what happens in their schools. They create the context in which professional development is promoted or discouraged (Marczely 1996). Principals should make certain that all inservice activities, including those in their mentoring programs, are sensitive to how adults learn best. A successful mentoring program should have the following characteristics (Marczely 1996):

- Professional development that targets teacher competencies, validated by research, and that has as its ultimate goal improved student achievement
- Professional development that is classroom-centered, focused on instructional development, and allows teachers to grow as professionals without leaving the classroom
- Professional development that is personalized, rather than consisting of common activities for all participants

Program Assessment

Mentoring programs should be continuously and systematically assessed from the beginning. Rather than waiting until the end of the school term, mentoring program assessments should be administered after each activity and also periodically throughout the year. Beginning teachers typically experience an emotional low point after only a few months on the job. Surveys conducted at this time may provide valuable information that will help determine the support necessary to help them maintain and sustain the necessary enthusiasm. The perceptions of other stakeholders should be considered too. Current and former mentors, peer coaches, and other staff can provide valuable information about activities, materials, training, or support activities that were especially effective for them. All program evaluations should ensure the anonymity of respondents.

Program assessment should focus on program goals and implementation, determining the difference between intended and actual outcomes. Principals should document programs' successes to provide convincing evidence to policy makers that mentoring new teachers is returning substantial dividends on their investment. Programs should be changed to reflect what has been learned from assessments.

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